

ABRAM JACOB JANZEN

10 August 1885 to 4 November 1967¹

I was born August 10, 1885, in Georgsthal in Fürstenland². When my parents died in 1899, I was only 15. My father died in spring and my mother in the fall the same year³. Because we had a machinery factory, we had a great deal to sell. The auction lasted for 3 days! It was a hard year and everything went for very low prices. A good lathe with all the tools went for 15 rubbles⁴. They dismantled the buildings and carted them away. Our house was moved to Neuendorf⁵. The other buildings were moved to Russian villages.

So I went to live with my brother⁶ in Michaelsburg⁷ where he farmed for a year before moving to America. My older brother, Jacob, had already been in America for a year. I had to return to Georgsthal to my sister's. She was married to an A. Martens who hired me to work on his farm. Pay in summer was 60 rubbles and in winter, 25. I stayed until I married Margaretha Martens⁸ on October 8, 1906. That fall I was required to go and be counted and in spring joined the forestry service. During my three-years service, my wife lived with her parents.

In the winter of 1910, I returned home and lived for 4 months with my in-laws. Then I purchased a farm, a half estate⁹, and immediately another 60 dessiatines. In 1914 we bought my in-law's farm—the year World War I broke out. I was

¹ This autobiography is in German and was translated by Anna (TOEWS) JANZEN and edited by David Bruce SAPELAK.

² Georgsthal is said to have been totally destroyed, but that is not true. Part of the village still exists as the western half of present day Heorhiivka (Георіївка), north west of Verkhni Rohachyk (Верхній Рогачик), near the Kachovskoje Reservoir of the Dnepr River. Dave and Sharon SAPELAK visited the site in 2004 and found the remains of Mennonite dwellings and clay roof tiles that had been manufactured in Halbstadt in the Molotschna colony. Georgsthal was founded in 1864 as Village Number One of the Fürstenland Colony by settlers from the Chortitza Colony. See the map.

³ Jakob Abram JANZEN, 1 December 1845 to Spring 1899; Maria (PAULS) JANZEN, 12 December 1842 to Autumn 1899.

⁴ In 1899 1 rubles (Imperial Russia) equaled 10.62USD, so the lathe would have sold for 159.30USD, the same purchasing power as 4,269USD in 2010.

⁵ Neuendorf now Shyroke (Широке) is one of the original villages in the Chortitza Colony. Buildings were completely re-cycled and what was carried away was likely all of the wooden components, windows and hardware. The bricks in this colony were not fired, but sun-dried clay and would return to the earth with exposure to the elements unless retrieved for another immediate use.

⁶ Isaac JANZEN

⁷ Fürstenland Village Number Three.

⁸ From the Fürstenland baptismal records, Margaretha was likely as sister to the A. Martens who married Abe's sister.

⁹ There were originally 30 farms (wirtschaft) in Georgsthal at 175 acres each. So, Abe's half-estate would be at maximum 87.7 acres. The Imperial Russian dessiatine equals 2.6997 acres, so the extra 60 would be 162 acres.



The five villages of the Fürstenland Settlement, Zaporizhia Oblast, Ukraine

called up again and was stationed at the Red Cross hospital in Kherson¹⁰ where I worked as an orderly the entire three years of the war.

Revolution came on the heels of war. I went home in the fall and in spring I went back to Kherson to retrieve my belongings. Now at that time the prisons were opened and the 2,000 inmates, all in shackles, lined up for the smiths to strike off their shackles. There was a huge pile of them. Men would tell their tales in the market. One man said he was guilty of murdering 13 people and had been 17 years in jail. Only one who has been through a revolution can begin to understand.

That winter the Makhnov¹¹ bands came into our villages, but no one was killed. I had to take a rig and team of horses and haul 5 cases of cannon balls and was five weeks with the Red army soldiers at the front— sometimes moving forward, sometimes retreating. Finally, I traded my good young horses for a pair of poor old ones. Then the Reds finally let me go home, about 75 vers¹². We were never sure that we wouldn't be put upon by one of the roving bands. I actually had to ??? through and often had to ford the rivers when we had to tie down the box so it wouldn't go swimming away.

When we were finally through the line, we arrived at the White army! These soldiers asked us how it really was on the Red front. They gave up papers so we could proceed. After three days were home. I had met two more farmers on this trip. I was only home four days and another roving band came and demanded that I give them another wagon and horses and myself as driver. I had only gone to the next village where I met a Friesen boy on the street. He had worked at our place and I asked if he would drive on with the rig. He would if I would give him ??? and shoes. Later he had been able to steel away back during the night.

The times were very changeable. But things seemed to become progressively more orderly. This kept many people back, but we had already decided to move to America. Many had sold farms and homes, generally to Lutherans from Wallinen who spoke High German. We sold our farm for 6,300 rubles with everything— inside and out— complete. We took only what we could carry to Canada. We kept two horses and a cow until we left. These we sold for 300 rubbles. We had to pay \$1,000 for the passports. In all we took about 3,300¹³ rubbles along¹⁴.

¹⁰ Kherson, at the mouth of the Dnepr River, was the home of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea.

¹¹ The Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno led a peasant insurgency against the Bolsheviks (Reds) and the Imperialists (White) during the civil war.

¹² 1 vers = 1.0668 km, so about 80 kilometers.

¹³ In 1926, the rubbles (Soviet) = 1.94USD. He brought 6,402USD (see next footnote) and in 2010 purchasing power, it would be the same as 78,744.

¹⁴ The Marburn's manifest states that he had \$500 in his possession.

Toward the end of July 1926, we left for America. We went to Moscow by train where we waited for four days for the passports to come from St. Petersburg¹⁵. We travelled through the Red Gate into Letland¹⁶. In Moscow we had changed our rubbles into dollars. We were asked where we got the money and I said from the sale of our farm. (I also had 30 illegal bills.¹⁷) We went on the Baltic Sea to Germany. No one was seasick, but Nick developed pneumonia. And we sailed through the Wilhelms canal¹⁸ until Danzig¹⁹. Here the ship anchored and we had to hand in our papers. We went to investigate the city. The German signboards and the use of the German language was striking. We went by train through Germany. It seemed strange that the conductor would say "Einsteigen"²⁰ and that we would step into the cars from the sides.

In England we had to wait another 4 days. Here Nick became quite sick. We didn't believe that we would be allowed to go on board ship, but God was with us and we were able to board the steam ship Marburn. When we embarked, I had Nick in my arms and he was all wrapped in a blanket. On each side stood a doctor to examine us. When I went through, one of them was very busy on his side and the other just waved me on. But my wife and Nick had to go into the ship's sick bay where he was well looked after. They put him in a cast (?).

Food was very good but after the first day we got seasick for all the eleven days on the ocean. We couldn't eat and had to just lie down. Only Jacob and Helen played every day in the ship's playroom. During the last days, a Jew came to me and advised us to buy very salty fish to eat. When I did that, I began to feel much better.

When we finally arrived at Newfoundland, everyone yelled "Land! We see land!" Everyone went on deck. In England, we had to see a number of doctors. A few we had to bribe, but we always managed to get through. Many people had to stay and wait quite a while before they could sail.

On September third we arrived at Quebec City. My wife and Nick were sent to the hospital where they stayed for five weeks. At the harbour there was a general store where we could buy supplies for our two-day train trip to Winnipeg²¹. I had bought mine there. After a fair bit of time on the train I looked into my pocket

¹⁵ The Marburn's manifest states that the Passport was issued "10.7.26 at Zaporosje."

¹⁶ Lithuania. They were heading for Riga where most embarked.

¹⁷ Abe's son, Peter, says the bills were from the Czarist period so were illegal in the USSR.

¹⁸ The Kiel Canal known as the Kaiser-Wilhelm Kanal until 1948, a 98-kilometre-long canal through Schleswig-Holstein saving 460 km off the voyage around Denmark. The canal is actually after Danzig.

¹⁹ Although Danzig is in Poland, it was a thoroughly German city having risen to prominence in the Prussian period.

²⁰ "Enter!" or "All aboard!"

²¹ CNR Montreal to Winnipeg in 1925 was 23 hours. They travelled CPR.

where I kept my money purse and it wasn't there! The papers in my other pocket were there. I became very agitated. Mr Kehler told me to be patient and look, but I really couldn't find it. When the train stopped, I met my neighbours standing outside talking. One said that his brother John, who had already been in Canada a year, had had the same experience. He had bought supplies at Quebec and had left his money purse on the counter. When he arrived in Winnipeg, his purse was already there. Well, that gave me a little hope. Then Mr Sawatsky came and asked all about it. The conductor phoned to Quebec and to Winnipeg, but nothing had been found.

When we travelled through this area, we were very unhappy because what we saw was mountains and rock, rock and mountains. Closer to Winnipeg, though, we saw farmland and that was quite different.

In Winnipeg a Holdeman, Mr Weibe, came and accompanied me to the bank. The banker asked me all about what had happened and advised me to write a letter to Letland where my cheque had been written so I could get my money in Canada. The cheque was a little over \$600²². I had between \$200 and \$300 cash in my purse.

When the cheque came from Letland they had deducted \$2 for service charges! When the bank had contacted New York, the original cheque had not been cashed and asked me to write them if I ever received the original back.

My brother, Isaac, had already been here for 20 years. When we arrived at the immigration office he was there and we met each other again. We spent two weeks in the immigration shed. Because I only had a few dollars in my pocket, my older brother, Jacob, lent me \$15 so we could buy food. The land office where we farmers could buy property was also in Winnipeg.

I drove with Mr. Peter Loewen to Chortitz and Grünthal to look at farms. So I took up a farm in Gnadenthal with a new house, a log barn with a straw roof, a quarter section of land, 3 horses, 7 cows and 10 chickens. We moved there before winter and stayed until spring. Then we rented a farm in Grünthal from the same company. It took it from Mr Unger and paid him \$300. It was 360 acres, but only 100 acres were arable and the rest was bush. This farm included 6 horses, 12 cows and all the machinery. All our neighbours were Germans. The school, creamery, post office and store were very close. Church service at the beginning was in the school. Later on, we moved a house into Grünthal close to our place and renovated it for a church. Then we also bought a car for \$450, a 1927 Ford, not an open car, but a sedan with windshields. We lived in Grünthal until 1935.

²² \$600 in 1926 in Canada would have the equivalent purchasing power of \$10,000 in 2010. Somewhere along the trip he must have spent a lot of money if he had started with the sum previously stated.

Then we moved to McCreary. Here we bought a quarter section for \$5. Later we had to also pay a dollar per acre. We had had an auction sale in Grünthal where the best cow brought \$8, and a hundred-pound pig only 50 cents. When we left for McCreary on May 6, we took 7 cows, 2 horses, a democrat, plough and harrows.

We bought lumber from Mr Fast which had been cut the last winter at a cost of \$15 per thousand board feet. Planed cost \$3.50 more. We had to go about 12 miles one way to get the wood, but we had a house built before winter. Since there was no ploughed land, we seeded a few acres at a neighbour's farm. Cows had very good pasture since they could graze anywhere, they pleased on the open land. We could make hay too. Later on, we milked 20 cows and made about 100 loads of hay. Then we bought another one and a half quarter of land, a McCormick tractor and then a Fordson tractor. Of the 40 farmers who were there at that time, only about 4 are left now.

We moved to Niverville in 1950 and have been here 12 years.²³

²³ Anna (TOEWS) JANZEN continues. In 1962 they moved to Clearbrook BC. Abram JANZEN died at Abbotsford BC on 4 November 1967 after a heart attack. Margaretha JANZEN stayed another year in BC before son Jake JANZEN went to BC and brought her back to Manitoba. She lived with Nick and Mary JANZEN in Winnipeg. After suffering several strokes, she moved into Donwood Manor in Winnipeg where she died 18 February 1981.

A QUESTION OF FAITH

Because I have never been able to get an answer to my questions about Jesus Christ and his life, I haven't a proper understanding and am compelled to give my own answers. To understand it in any other way would mean to omit Matthew 5:18. Then I say that one or both are false since both cannot be right. Where one says yes the other says no. As it is said, let your yes be yes and your no, no.

When we allow John 5:37 to stand where Jesus himself says, "You have never heard my voice or seen my body" and in Exodus we read that God has spoken 74 times directly to Moses and 20 times Moses spoke to God... What can and do we want to believe, John 5:37 or Moses? Who is and where is God?

Most people have a concept of God but they are very different from one another. I also have a concept of God our creator. He doesn't only control the earth, but the sun, moon and stars and everything, much more than we can comprehend. He is not unjust. It wasn't God's plan that Christ who was totally just and portrayed without sin had to suffer to death at the cross. But God allowed it to happen.